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ABSTRACT

This paper is an assessment of research needs that attempts (1) to identify areas of current needs in early childhood education, (2) to determine which of the areas would be most appropriate for the research and development of educational materials, and (3) to propose solution strategies for those areas identified. Data sources included responses from personal interviews with 11 prominent early childhood theorists (each of the interviews was structured according to a list of 19 questions in five areas), results from reviews of the literature in early childhood education, recommendations made by 13 participants representing regional and state agencies, school districts, etc., at a regional conference in Austin, Texas, and responses from brief telephone interviews with 10 people currently working in the area of research and development for carepersons. Identified needs and recommendations from each data source are reviewed. In general, the results indicate a need in five major areas: (1) more effective education of parents, paraprofessionals, and other adults involved in caring for children; (2) more research directed toward the development of effective training materials for parents and paraprofessionals--research which utilizes an exportable, modular design, flexible training strategies, and multimedia materials; (3) more accessibility to parenting materials already developed, (4) more research concerning what effective parenting is; and (5) more effective strategies for utilizing information obtained from screening instruments used with young children in program development. (Author/SB)

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Identification of Research and Product Needs in Early Childhood

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The history of early childhood education during the past seventy years has been closely aligned with the history of social change. As the political and socio-economic conditions of human beings have been either degraded or enhanced, so have the conditions of childhood education (Dowley, 1971). According to Dowley (1971), the young child in the course of two centuries, has been the victim of every social ill or the beneficiary of every social good, depending on the times in which he lived and the position to which he was born. Early childhood education in the United States reflects such a course of history.

Nursery schools were first established in the United States during the 1920's, with the primary purpose of providing day care for working class children and fostering the socio-emotional growth of middle class children. These first schools were located primarily on college and university campuses where the curriculum emphasized habit training and physical health. During the depression years of the 1930's, the federal government became involved in nursery school education with the purpose of providing jobs for unemployed teachers. The curriculum still focused on "good" habits and physical care of young children.

World War II (W.W. II) brought about continued federal involvement through federally funded day care centers for children of the mothers employed in war industries. The focus of curriculum remained centered on child care. Soon though, as a result of the writings of Gesell (1940, 1943) and Spock (1946), the curriculum gradually began to take on the function of providing preventive psychiatry for young children. The post W.W. II years brought a

new emphasis on socio-emotional development of children. Parents of young children were encouraged to plan peer group experiences for their preschool children. The parent-cooperative nursery school movement flourished in the post W.W. II years.

Following the W.W. II years psychoanalytic theory was clearly evident in preschool practices. Frustration, aggression, and the ventilation of feelings were of major concern to early childhood educators. In 1950, Erickson presented his theory of the Eight Stages of Man and its relationship to the development of a healthy personality for young children.

Research studies in child development and early learning gained momentum in the early to midfifties. W.W. II and the Korean conflict drew attention to ethnic and cultural differences in the care and rearing of children. The concerns of the nursery schools were the young children's adjustment, feelings of prejudice, and ability to get along with others.

The rediscovery of some of the earlier writings of Piaget in the late fifties directed attention to the cognitive aspects of development, and studies were directed toward how children learn. The launching of Sputnik I in 1957 increased the interest in cognitive development and academic achievement. The curriculum of nursery schools began to reflect this push toward academic achievement and excellence. By the early sixties the direction of thought in early childhood education was toward "rediscovering the mind of the child", (Martin, 1960). The influence of linguistics and the importance of language for educational growth stimulated great interest and research in language development (Ervin-Tripp, 1966).

The post W.W. II years had been a time of great technological expansion. Highly skilled and professionally educated persons were in great demand. This

widened the educational and socio-economic gap between the affluent and the poor. In 1963, Hunt exposed the effects of cultural and educational deprivation on a large segment of the population. In the same year, Deutch's research indicated that the preschool, kindergarten, or day care experience, or a combination of these were associated with higher scores on intelligence tests upon entry to first grade. He also found that regardless of social class the advantage of preschool experiences was evident even more so at fifth grade. As a result of these findings and others, Project Head Start was initiated in 1965. It began as a summer program but was extended to provide a year-round program of comprehensive services for young children and their families.

Although the emphasis of the sixties was on the cognitive development of children, it was found that early childhood programs, school based and directed toward children only failed to produce desired long-term gains (Stein and Smith, 1973). Head Start was generally more successful where there was involvement (Head Start Report, 1971). Home Start (Home Start Guidelines, 1971), Sesame Mothers' Project (Filep, 1971), and similar programs produced more positive results with their emphasis on parent education and parent involvement.

With the civil rights movement and the federally funded program for "disadvantaged" children came the utilization of paraprofessionals from the community to help strengthen the ties between the community and the school and to further enhance the vocational aspirational levels of the people within the community. Many of these paraprofessionals lacked formal training in child care and child development. Training programs were designed to help meet their needs.

Early childhood education has made great strides forward in this century. By 1967, there were 1,145,000 three-and-four-year-olds enrolled in preschool programs. In 1972, over 3,000,000 young children were enrolled in some kind of preschool program (Dowley, 1971). The seventies have presented more challenges to educators of young children. New economic and social changes are occurring. Television has become a powerful influence over the minds of young children. Many areas of early childhood development still remain inadequately researched. With the many changes that have occurred and are occurring there is a need for early childhood educators to further identify areas in which additional research can be undertaken during the seventies for the education and development of young children.

The purposes of this needs assessment were as follows: (1) to identify areas of current needs in early childhood education, (2) to determine which of the areas would be most appropriate for the research and development of educational materials, and (3) to propose solution strategies for those areas identified.

METHOD

Procedure

In order to identify research and product needs in Early Childhood, four distinct phases of study were conducted. In the first phase, eleven nationally recognized experts identified problems which should be addressed through research and development efforts. The eleven experts interviewed were: Carl Bereiter (Ontario Institute of Education), Urie Bronfenbrenner (Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Cornell University), Bettye Caldwell (Center for Early Childhood Education and Development, University of Arkansas),

Ira Gordon (Institute for Development of Human Resources, University of Florida), Edith Grotberg (Office of Child Development), Lilian Katz (Director, Eric Clearinghouse on Early Childhood Education), James Miller (Professor of Education Studies, Emory University), Richard Orton (Associate Director, Office of Early Childhood Development, Austin, Texas), Ronald Parker (Center for Advance Study in Education, Central University of New York), Jeannette Watson (Director, Office of Early Childhood Development Austin, Texas), and Edward Zigler (Department of Psychology, Yale University). Each of the interviews were structured according to a list of nineteen questions in five areas:

Theories of Early Childhood Development and Education

1. Is there a theoretical position regarding early childhood growth and development that you find especially valuable?
2. Is there a theoretical position regarding early childhood education that you find especially valuable?
3. What early childhood research, within the last decade, do you feel is particularly meaningful and stimulating?
4. What important problems in early childhood development or education have been relatively neglected as far as research is concerned?

Current States of the Field

5. What should be the focus in planning and delivering early childhood education?
6. Where is the "action" in this field?
7. Do you see changes in consumer populations in the next decade?
8. Are there existing programs you feel have had promising results and should be expanded?

Key Tasks for Children and Adults

9. Are there identifiable essential childhood developmental tasks that apply across ethnic and cultural lines?
10. Are there suitable measurement techniques for such tasks?

11. Are there any universals in parenting or caretaker skills?
12. Could these be taught? If so, how?

The Future of Early Childhood Education

13. What are your hopes for early childhood education of the future?
14. How would you see these hopes realistically applied?
15. What part could the larger social institutions play?

What SEDL Could Contribute

16. Specifically, how could the expertise of an educational laboratory, oriented toward products in curriculum development, media use, packaging, and marketing, be applied to best advantage in the area of early childhood?
17. What kinds of products could have the most impact?
18. Who would be the consumers?
19. How might such products be disseminated?

In the second phase, a literature search in the area of early childhood examined research findings, development efforts, demonstration projects, position papers, and other written materials. Thus, documents in the areas of Parent Education, Teacher Education and Television/Film resulted from this phase.

The third phase was a conference during which representatives of regional and state agencies, school districts, etc., discussed potential delivery systems, product content, and formats for increasing the knowledge base and skills of parents and other carepersons.

Regional Conference Participants:

Carolyn Carroll

Program Designer
Office of Early Childhood Development
State of Texas

David Chapa	Program Supervisor Regional Office of Economic Opportunity
Joe Frost	Department of Curriculum and Instruction The University of Texas at Austin
Barry Klein	Region XIII Early Childhood Specialist State of Texas
Allee Mitchell	Training Officer Texas Southern University
Richard Orton	Associate Director Office of Early Childhood Development State of Texas
Carmen Pena	3-4-5 Project University of Houston
Mabel Pitts	Adult Education Department of Public Welfare State of Texas
Lucille Rochs	Training Officer San Antonio College
Frances Vargas	Early Childhood Program Austin Independent School District
Libby Vernon	Elementary Education Consultant Texas Education Agency
Joan Williams	Special Education-Plan A Texas Education Agency
Richard Ybarra	Region XVII Early Childhood Programs State of Texas

In the fourth phase ten telephone interviews were conducted with substantive early childhood experts currently working in the area of research and development for carepersons. All were asked three questions: (1) Do you agree that training for carepersons is important? (2) What kinds of training needs do you see as critical? How can they be addressed effectively? (3) What would be the most appropriate mode of delivery for training materials?

Telephone Interview Participants:

Dell Felder	Houston Independent School District Houston, Texas
Walter Hodges	Georgia State University Atlanta, Georgia
Jenny Klein	Office of Child Development Washington, D.C.
Ron Lally	Syracuse University Syracuse, New York
Phyllis Levenstein	Mother-Child Home Program Demonstration Center Freeport, New York
Jean McCarthy	National Leadership Training Institute University of Arizona Tucson, Arizona
Ann O'Keefe	Director, Home Start Program Office of Child Development Washington, D.C.
Burton White	Graduate School of Education Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts
Ray Williams	Director, Child Development Associate Consortium University of Maryland College Park, Maryland

Data Source

Data sources included (1) responses from 11 personal interviews conducted from January to April, 1973 (each of the interviews was structured according to a list of 19 questions in five areas); (2) recommendations made by 13 participants at a 1-day regional conference held in Austin, Texas, in March, 1973; (3) responses from telephone interviews with 10 early childhood experts across the country, currently working in the area of research and development for carepersons (each of the experts were asked three questions), and (4) results of reviews of the literature in early childhood education

with particular emphasis in the areas of parent education, teacher training, and television and film research. All of the data was compiled and synthesized to determine areas in which research needed to be conducted and areas in which new products needed to be developed.

RESULTS

Phase I. (Interviews)

There was general consensus among the eleven experts interviewed that future efforts should focus on increasing the skills of parents, carepersons, and other adults who are significant in the child's life. The educators varied in their theoretical position regarding child growth and development and early childhood education. Their approaches ranged from behaviorism, developmental psychology, and neo-Piagetian, to ecological approaches stressing the importance of the family and the community.

There was little agreement among the experts on the value of recent research. Some considered most of the current research to be trivial or poorly done, while others were impressed with the semi-laboratory approach of looking at parents and children in a structured relationship: field intervention research, family survey research, using correlation methods, and efforts to measure children's ability to perform Piagetian tasks in school and at home.

The eleven experts agreed that important problems in early childhood were being neglected in current research, but there was no consensus which were the most important problems were. Primary areas of concern included the following:

Instrumentation

Longitudinal and affective research

Mental and educational development

Status of women and the world of work

Supportive environments that would make families effective

The child in the context of the home and the community

Moral decisions on an internal ethic for early childhood education

Evaluation of the successes and failures of day care

Cost-effectiveness analyses of day care

Examination of differences among subcultures to determine which are caused by ethnicity, which by poverty, and which by other external factors.

The experts favored several different focuses for planning and implementing early childhood education programs. These included providing for: (1) parenting and caregiving skills, (2) the whole child and his environment, (3) specific needs of children, (4) neighborhood day care services, (5) development of state plans, and (6) the identification of goals for the development of educational products.

The experts failed to agree on which if any existing programs were promising and should be expanded. However, they responded positively to the hypothesis that there were identifiable essential childhood developmental tasks that could apply across ethnic and cultural lines. All of the respondents were pessimistic as to whether present measurement techniques were suitable for identifying and evaluating such tasks.

The group was in almost complete agreement that there are universals in parenting or caregiver skills. They agreed that these universals could be taught, but slightly disagreed concerning how they should be taught and to whom.

Finally, there was little consensus as to the experts' hopes for early childhood education of the future. Early screening, the necessity of achievement goals, and the need for models and programs that are affordable and easy to disseminate were mentioned. Some felt that better coordination among families, the community, and business would be necessary. One educator thought unions and similar collective bargaining institutions could bring about future programs.

There was general agreement among the experts about how a regional laboratory like SEDL could apply its expertise to best advantage in the area of early childhood development and education. Eight felt that institutions like SEDL could best use their expertise in producing audio and visual materials for libraries, schools, neighborhood centers, and commercial television. Some suggested further research in the area of dissemination. Ten of the eleven experts thought that these materials should be directed toward adults: parents, teachers, and other caregivers.

Phase II. (Literature Search)

Several significant findings evolved from the literature search in early childhood development and education. It was found that although child-rearing is a significant societal task, few adults in this country have ever received formal training to prepare them for it or to help them carry it out effectively. This applies to all adults who care for children--parents, teachers and day care personnel. This dearth of knowledge about parenting and child rearing was found to be primarily due to the lack of a solid data base upon which to make prescriptive suggestions. This seemed to exist because the social science research in this country had not focused sufficient attention on

parenting. The search revealed that what knowledge did exist was scattered and not easily accessible to most parenting ones. Training materials for parents have traditionally required reading complex written reports and narration, which has often rendered such materials inappropriate for certain segments of the population.

Thus, there were two overriding needs which emerged: (1) to collect information on parenting and make it more generally available and useable, and (2) to provide comprehensive multimedia training programs for parents and paraprofessionals which do not depend upon only written accounts.

Phase III. (Regional Conference)

There was complete consensus among the conference participants that the immediate and primary target population for early childhood education and development should be adults who are carepersons of young children--parents, teachers, and all others involved in the care of young children. The group emphasized the need for the training of persons who in the future will be working with handicapped children.

The participants recommended that materials developed for carepersons for:

- (1) flexible and allow for personalization and individualization
- (2) tested for different social, cultural, and economic levels
- (3) affordable for low SES groups
- (4) clearly and simply written
- (5) more effectively evaluated
- (6) easy to obtain, use, store, and retrieve.
- (7) researched to determine the effectiveness of various presentation modes

- (8) researched for the relevance of language and culture
- (9) coordinated and disseminated through a central clearing house.

Phase IV. (Ten Telephone Interviews)

From all of the persons interviewed, the following items were a synthesis of their recommendations:

- (1) that training for carepersons of young children was of prime importance
- (2) that training materials focus on a core of skills with special units available for handicapped children or other children with special needs
- (3) that materials developed emphasize the importance of the role of parents in order to help them further develop confidence in their own capabilities
- (4) that parents need more parent-child interaction techniques so as to help foster children's development of affective and cognitive skills
- (5) that parents be given alternatives for handling specific behavioral situations
- (6) that training materials include filmed or videotaped situations of positive behavior, produced in a natural setting, and that follow-up booklets be written and illustrated around a single concept which carepersons could read in a short time.

CONCLUSIONS

There was general agreement that the greatest need at that time was for more background knowledge and skill development on the part of parents, paraprofessionals, and other adults involved in caring for children. The inability of carepersons to perform child services effectively and adequately usually was due to the lack of specific training for this role.

There was substantial agreement that a systems approach to the planning and designing of improved parenting and caregiving services be employed. That included research and development efforts focusing on the design of alternative product presentation modes for a variety of user groups. Also, research needed to be conducted for the purpose of determining the most effective formats for materials directed toward audiences with varied educational backgrounds. There was common agreement that trainers needed to have access to parenting and paraprofessional materials already developed.

Specific areas of weakness in early childhood education efforts which were identified by this needs assessment included: (1) lack of validated materials for training parents and other carepersons to be effective in working with and meeting the needs of young children; (2) lack of definitive research in parent and careperson effectiveness; (3) lack of incorporation of research findings into validated, exportable, and replicable products designed to bring about positive change in the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the target audience; (4) lack of effective strategies, using the information gained from cognitive, affective, and psychomotor screening instruments, to develop viable programs for young children.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Generally, the results of this study clearly identified areas in which new research needs to be directed and in which new products need to be developed. More specifically, as a result of this study, new program efforts have been funded by the National Institute of Education which hope to provide better insights into the need areas of developing a parenting materials information

center, utilization of multimedia training packages for parents and paraprofessional teachers, and the effectiveness of television spots for communicating specific child-rearing principles to parents and other persons involved in caring for young children.

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